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THE NECESSITY AND BENEFITS OF EARLY RELIGIOUS TRAINING.

A SERMON,

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"Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little."—Isaiah xxviii. 9, 10.

COMMENTATORS do not harmonize perfectly in their construction of this passage; but whether we regard it as the language of the drunkards of Ephraim, deriding the Lord's messengers for the plainness and urgency of their unwelcome instructions, or as the language of the prophet himself affirming interrogatively the spiritual ignorance and imbecility of the people, with their prophets and priests, it can hardly be questioned that the Holy Spirit clearly indicates the important truth that the knowledge of our relations to God and eternity is to be earnestly inculcated on the rising generation. There may be little hope that the uncircumcised ear of *age* will hearken to instruction, or that the *habitual* transgressor will listen to the warning voice of the Lord; but there is hope of the young, that precept upon precept and line upon line, drawn from the oracles of God, even though uttered by stammering lips, will not be unavailing. The reported remark of one

of England's noble sons, that "were we deprived of what we learn during the three first years of our lives, we should be the most ignorant beings on the face of the globe," is less extravagant in point of fact than in sound; and there had been no tinge of extravagance nor less of shrewdness in the remark, if, instead of three, he had specified the first seven or ten years of life. In those years, beyond question, are laid the foundations of the social and religious character which every man carries to the grave; and the firmness and fair proportions of the structure reared upon them, will correspond with their solidity and breadth. And when in varied language God commands the father to make known the truth unto his children—to teach the words that he commands diligently unto them—to talk of them when sitting in the house, and walking by the way, lying down and rising up, and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, he surely imposes on every man the express obligation to pour divine instruction, in every variety of form and without sparing, into the minds of his infant offspring. And then, admitting the principle involved in the second great law of the universe—the equal worth of all human souls—we cannot, without absurdity, object to the claims of any portion of the rising generation within the reach of our benevolence, upon our practical regards to their instruction in the revealed will of God.

If we are to be delivered from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood; if our sons are to be as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner stones polished after the similitude of a palace, then must they be taught that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, and their responsibility to *Him* for all their doings, and the extent and spirituality of the law which binds them to the cultivation of purity and love in all their relations to universal being. And if they are to be themselves saved from the dominion of lust, and the power of the second death, they must be taught by "precept upon precept, and line upon line," that they are shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin; that they are estranged from God, from their first entrance into life; that the blood of Christ alone cleanseth from sin; and that his intercessions only secure them forgiveness and eternal life. And they must be taught that no man, except he be born again, can see the kingdom of heaven; that the Holy Spirit alone convinceth of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; that repentance, faith, and new obedience, are essential to acceptance with God; that rewards of surpassing glory are laid up for the righteous, and woes of unutterable intensity are reserved for the wicked. Of these truths, so fundamental in the Christian system, none can be overlooked in the instruction of the young more than the old, without putting in jeopardy their welfare for time and eternity; and *these alone* explained

with simplicity, and diligently enforced, will leave nothing, in the form of direct instruction, to be attempted for their salvation.

You will allow me to suggest a few obvious considerations, in illustration of the high importance of instruction so explained and enforced.

1. The youth learns nothing good until he is taught. Foolishness is bound up in his heart. Though wise to do evil, to do good he has no knowledge. It is commonly an arduous enterprise to educate him for *worldly* eminence; but far greater are the skill and labor necessary to educate him for glory, honor, and immortality. In the *first* case, the difficulties to be overcome lie chiefly in the volatility of the mind, reluctance to salutary discipline, indifference to useful knowledge, the fascinations of novelty, the love of amusement, and a thirst for sensual gratifications. In the *last* case, beside these difficulties, existing in full strength, there is a heartfelt *aversion* to the claims of *religion* to be removed, and a love of moral culture to be inspired; the force of corrupt example operating on every side, is to be broken down, and the efforts of the adversary to cultivate tares instead of wheat on the virgin soil, are to be defeated. The young mind, it is true, has all the faculties of riper years, but they are yet in their immaturity, and wait the lapse of time to complete their development. Reason and judgment are too weak to give a wise direction to the course of life, even when perception, imagination and memory, have acquired great activity and energy; and unless controlled and guided by the paramount influence of correct instruction constantly imparted, the youth is ever liable to plunge into darkness and ruin. He is ever exposed also to the withering blast that sweeps along the path of the wily unbeliever and the bold transgressor. Unhappily the number of those who cast off fear, and abandon themselves to works of iniquity is not small, even in an age and country as enlightened as ours; and, with them, virtue in her loveliest forms is the subject of unceasing reproach, and vice in its most unseemly garb is the theme of commendation and applause; wine and debauchery inflame their blood; stratagem and violence absorb their thick-coming fancies, and daringness of spirit and hardihood of resistance to the claims of God, give them fearful power over the simplicity of childhood.

And what if God hath said, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not"—the untaught and inexperienced youth, heedless of the admonition, lends a willing ear to the Syren voice that assures him of safety in indulgences that perverted appetites demand. Certain it is that no man can take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned, nor go upon hot coals and his feet not be burned; but the young, even if instructed, are slow to credit what the Almighty saith, and, obediently, to turn away from the companionship of

fools. The structure of the mind, the depravity of the heart, the force of ungodly examples, and the direct efforts of those who set their mouths against the heavens, render it *certain* that the untaught youth will learn nothing good.

2. The susceptibilities of the young mind to deep and enduring impression are strongly marked. The melted wax receives not more readily the impress of the seal, nor does the fused metal take more certainly the form of the mould into which it is cast, than the infant mind receives the principles and yields to the passions which sway maturer minds in contact with it. And the impressions of the earliest years are not lost, down to life's latest period. Long after those of later date are effaced are they retained in nearly all their original freshness; and so inwrought are they with the very framework of the moral system, that death itself fails to annihilate them, and the light of eternity restores them in more than their original vividness. Whether these impressions shall assimilate the child to his Maker, or strengthen his inherent corruptions, is a momentous question. It is a fair question, too, worthy to be revolved by every one who bears a part in the training of the youthful world around him—whether the principles of wisdom and truth shall be permanently stamped on the fair page of childhood, assimilating it to God, or whether the principles of error shall take their place, and form fit sluiceways for floods of vain imaginings bearing away the soul irresistibly to the ocean of death! Give to the mind of youth the moral culture which its susceptibilities permit, and which the authority of Heaven requires; watch the first buddings of its moral powers, and direct its earliest efforts to objects of transcendent interest, as the scriptures reveal them, and the labor cannot be in vain. Millions, unable to distinguish the right hand from the left, have received impressions from the lips of maternal piety of infinite value; and other millions, by the combination of scriptural instruction with parental prayers and tears have been prepared to swell the joys of heaven by their labors and songs, who had otherwise been left to everlasting wailings. You have seen the rich intervale over which the plough and the harrow have never passed; it was not bare like the sands of an African desert, or the hill-tops, stretching upwards into regions of perpetual frost; but luxuriance was there—the luxuriance, indeed, of the bramble instead of the vine, of the morass instead of the wheatfield; but it was luxuriance still. Such is the mind richly furnished with heaven's endowments, but denied the moral culture, to which by birthright it is entitled. Its productions, though abundant are useless, as the weeds of the garden, or noxious as the grapes of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrah. "The two legged animal" says one "that eats of nature's dainties what his taste or appetite craves, and quenches his thirst at the crystal fountain; who propagates his kind in

occasion or lust prompt; repels injuries, and takes absolute ease and repose, is like a tree of the forest, purely of nature's growth. But this same savage, hath within him the seeds of the logician, the man of taste and breeding, the orator, the statesman, the man of virtue, and the saint; which seeds, though planted in his mind by nature, yet, through want of culture and exercise, must lie for ever buried and be hardly perceivable by himself or others."

Though this opinion of the philosopher needs an important qualification in one point at least, it is yet too clearly true as a whole to admit of question. Every mind is rich in native wealth though it be yet in the ore, and is capable of an expansion large enough to embrace an amount of knowledge and love as yet unattained by the most exalted spirits of heaven; and, if sanctified, it will pour into the treasury of God a boundless revenue of imperishable riches. But abandon it to wantonness, or allow its susceptibilities to be engrossed with the dreamings of infidelity, and the pleasures of sense, and it had been better for it at the moment of its birth, to have been blotted out from among Jehovah's works.

3. It has passed into a maxim that "knowledge is power." The sceptre awes nations into submission to individual will; the sword slays thousands, and the arm of the victor binds millions in chains; but it is *instructed* mind that sways the sceptre, wields the sword, and nerves the conqueror's arm. Without some knowledge of the philosophy of man, and the principles of science, and without a warm imagination, an eloquent tongue, or a vigorous pen, no man within the domains of civilization, can maintain a permanent ascendancy over his brethren. He may stir up strife and contention; he may shed torrents of blood, and pile up mountains of human bones, but he leaves the world as destitute of every monument of well directed skill and power, as are the wilds of Africa, or the untrodden forests of America, while his own name perishes, or becomes the loathing of mankind. Knowledge, indeed, like every other gift of heaven, not excepting even the blood of Christ, is often perverted to purposes of mischief, for

"Perversion makes man's guilty way"

from the cradle to the grave, but it nullifies the value of no blessing of God; and not wealth or honor, health or pleasure, instinct or conscience, are less justly contemned for their frequent abuse and prostitution to ignoble ends, than that furniture of the mind which is sometimes desecrated by ambition and revenge. Shall heaven's bounties be dashed from existence because of their misuse, and the darkness of primeval chaos be thrown over the manifested goodness of God, because man employs it to accomplish wicked devices?

And then no wealth like that of mind rises superior to the plottings of knavery, the fluctuations of fortune, and the capricious action of the elements of nature. Disease may dim its lustre, and age abate its force, and an overruling Providence defeat its immediate aims; but not even death itself, sweeping away all that is earthly beside, lays upon it the hand of violence. Man carries it with him, unharmed by the convulsion that rends asunder the body and spirit, beyond the grave, where it secures him a place but little lower than the angels, and forms an amount of capital, if I may so speak, proportioned to his present acquisitions, with which he enters on the holy commerce of heaven. Of course you will not understand me to speak of knowledge and piety as synonymous. They may live and flourish to some extent independently. But wherever they co-exist, knowledge is the most efficient handmaid of religion, while in their separation, ignorance is religion's most powerful antagonist.

"Blessed is he who knoweth wisdom and instruction and perceiveth the words of understanding." Connect love and knowledge, as they have not unfrequently been connected in ancient and modern times, and give them a fair field for their united labors, and none can estimate fully the amount of their happy results to the glory of God, and the welfare of the world.

True it is that *Baxter* and *Owen*, *Leighton* and *Edwards*, to say nothing of thousands more, endeared to Christian recollection by learning and piety, with *Noah* and *Moses*, *Elijah* and *Paul* had entered heaven though possessed of a faith no more intelligent than that which sustains her who—

"Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true."

Yet with only a common measure of intellectual resources and cultivation, the luminous productions of their pens, and the holy example of their lives had done little to strengthen the faith of their brethren, and bless the world. Learning gave lustre and efficiency to their piety. Knowledge, sanctified by communion with Heaven gave them the mighty influence they threw over the generations in which they lived; an influence that has come down to our own times, and will flow onward, in ever-widening streams, till time shall be no more.

Their intellectual treasures embalm their piety in sweet and everlasting remembrance. Not the wealth of Croesus, combined with the valor of Hannibal, and the rhetoric of Tully, and the clemency of Augustus, and the virtues of all the wise men and great men of pagan antiquity, had they fallen to the share of these holy men had left upon their memory the perfumes they now bear and which the lapse of ages will not exhale; nor have placed on their heads, crowns so studded with gems of unfading lustre.

And these are the more cogent reasons for urging onward the march of intellectual improvement, because the day has arrived when infidelity, throwing aside to some extent, its distinctive name, and the philosophical garb of other years, penetrates every community in more specious guise and spreads abroad

"In legions, angel forms—
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
Of Vallambrosa"

Or, if circumstances permit, assumes a bold and haughty front and challenges "the sacramental host of God's elect" in the boastful spirit of Philistia's champion; when Romanism too, half-healed of its deadly wound, resolves to strengthen the despotisms of the Old World, and crush the liberties of the New, and fastens upon all nations, the yoke of a baptized Paganism, heavier far than ever Boodh or Brama laid upon the neck of China or Hindostan; and when errors in every shape lulling individual and public conscience into profound repose, banishing the fear of future retribution, and cherishing illusory hopes of heaven, start up like mushrooms among the fens and marshes of abounding ignorance, and multiply like venomous reptiles in solitudes penetrated by the rays of a vertical sun; now is the time for every friend of God and man to disengage himself from the folds of a voluntary supineness, to put on zeal as a cloak and take the word of God for his sword, and press onward, cleaving his way through the thickest of the foe, maintaining in simplicity the claims of God, vindicating the honor of the Cross, and opening the door for thousands around him, and coming after him, to enter the kingdom of heaven. And for labors and conflicts such as these, let the young be qualified by teaching them knowledge, and making them understand doctrine, giving them "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little."

4. Scriptural knowledge is not only of surpassing *value*, but is more easily imparted to the young than most of that human knowledge for which the opening powers are often severely tasked. Said a great and holy man of old, whose counsellors were eminent men and learned in all the wisdom of their generation, "I have more understanding than all my teachers." Spending his youth amid his father's flocks at Bethlehem and blessed no doubt with pious parental instruction, he made the testimonies of the Lord his meditation by day and by night. God, in all his greatness was ever before him. The Holy Spirit instructed him. He searched the scriptures and pondered the path of his feet. Wonderful is the adaptation of the book of God to the demands of the immortal mind, whether in youth or old age. "Blessed is the man" and blessed is the child, "whose delight is in the law of the Lord;

for he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." He has comfort in the depths of affliction, strength in the hour of temptation, and comes forth unharmed from the perils of the world, rejoicing in the labors and tears that assure him a rich harvest of glory. Whether the powers of reason crave the loftiest subjects for their exercise; or the imagination asks the widest field wherein to expatiate; or the spirit of devotion seeks an exhaustless store of ailment; or the powers of eloquence require appropriate argument and diction to move the senate chamber or the sch ol room, all is found here. For the ignorant there is overflowing instruction in its simplest forms; for the learned there are mysteries without end, profound enough to engage and baffle an angel's powers; for the careless and the headstrong there is reproof uttered in the strongest terms; for the timid and irresolute there are encouragement and assurance in the most soothing language; for the erring there are directions that none can misunderstand; for the presumptuous warnings given in tones of thunder, and for the broken-hearted, consolation is poured forth "in strains as sweet as angels use." It is a mine of unfathomable wealth, and fully yields its soul-enriching treasures to the search of the diligent while it leaveth poverty enough to him that dealeth in it with a slack hand. And if the unstable and unbelieving find therein things hard to be understood which they wrest to their own destruction, the humble and devout find more therein which are intelligible and plain as they

> "Read and revere the sacred page
> Which not the whole creation could produce,
> Which not the conflagration shall destroy;"

they hide it in their hearts, con it over in their hours of retirement, and pour it forth with joy on the ears of the children of folly. When *Tertullian* spends year after year in reading only the sacred volume —and *Jerome* commits it all to memory—and *Theodosius*, burdened with the cares of empire all the day, devotes to it the night-watches,—and *Locke*, a prince among philosophers, gives the last fifteen years of life to perfecting his acquaintance with it, because "it hath God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error, for its matter"—we have a practical demonstration of its value in the estimation of the highest order of human intellect. And a better argument still is supplied to us on this point by Paul's commendation of the noble *Bereans*, and of the youthful *Timothy* and the humble *Priscilla* and *Aquila*, whose diligence and proficiency in the study of the scriptures prepared them to contend earnestly for the faith and to expound the way of God more perfectly than even the eloquent Apollos.

Was it worthy the care of Heaven to give to man such revelations of principles lying at the foundation of the whole moral govern-

ment of God? It cannot then be unworthy of the care of man to write them as with the point of a diamond on the enduring tablets of his soul. Unless his affections cluster around them until they control his movements, and impel him to extend their influence over the world, he achieves no permanent victory over spiritual enemies, and is shut out from the Paradise of God.

Can this sublime knowledge be imparted to the young? Why question it? If difficulties arise from immaturity and levity of mind, they are more than balanced by freedom from the prejudices of age, and the perplexing cares of life; by their docility and instinctive desire to penetrate the unknown; and by their unsuspecting confidence in the ability of their appointed teachers. Their natural aversion to God is but partially developed, and waits the coming of riper years to mature its strong resistance to the Divine claims. In the mean time skill, tenderness, and perseverance will interest the kindlier feelings of their social nature, and bring their expanding energies into successful operation, so that when followed by the "power from on high" in answer to prayer, each opposing influence will give way, and they will bow to the force of truth. Nor is this affirmed so much as a matter of just theory as of facts, for in all generations the youthful mind has readily yielded to the continued dropping of Divine instruction; leaving it to be inferred that in the present and future generations the same experiment faithfully made shall be equally successful. And the eagerness with which children and youth seize upon the explanation of facts in the kingdoms of nature and Providence, or the historical illustration of great principles upon similitudes and allegories, whether from the lips of *Jesus Christ*, of *Solomon*, or *Bunyan*, discloses a foundation on which the man of benevolence may place himself, and pour instruction into their minds on the most sublime themes of revelation with little danger of labouring in vain. Even those *difficulties* over which many mature but darkened minds stumble into perdition, may be removed from the path-way of the young; and the plainer preceptive and doctrinal teachings of the Holy Spirit may be indelibly inscribed on their understanding by familiar reference to the facts of natural science, to the movements of Providence among the nations, and to the laws, customs, manners, and religions prevailing in different tribes and generations of men. Harmless curiosity ever awake and vigorous in childhood derives gratification from illustrations like these, and the mind nourished and cheered by constant accessions to its fund of information, arises to new and animated effort, and brings within its grasp that knowledge of God and the unseen world which purifies and elevates all its aspirations.

As a matter of fact, children have often been thus taught divine knowledge beyond those of riper years; and what has been already done, may be again done on an enlarged scale. And whatever

can be done to render the oracles of God intelligible to the young ought to be done. For no mind of celestial birth is ever guiltlessly doomed to spiritual ignorance and perverseness when by earnest and prayerful effort it can be brought up from the horrible pit and miry clay, and established on the Rock of ages. And surrounded as it is with corruption, cramped by its connexion with the body, and exposed to hostile influences without number, it can be neglected only at the hazard of everlasting shame and contempt.

5. The weightiest obligations rest on PARENTS to give their children such instruction. Nature constitutes them their guardians and teachers; and instinctive affection binds them to provide for their prosperity, and secure them the world's respect and friendship. These obligations are sanctioned and enlarged by the express authority of heaven, binding them to train them up in the way they should go, and secure them an inheritance among those that are sanctified.

As Abraham commanded his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord—as Hannah lent her son to the LORD all the days of his life—as David walked within his house with a perfect heart, and Eunice made her son from a child to know the scriptures, so is every parent bound to command his children to observe and do after the words of God's law. Children are an heritage of the Lord as truly as they are objects of nature's desire and hope. Their usefulness and comfort deeply involve the honor and the welfare of a multitude that man cannot number; but their usefulness and comfort depend on their early adoption of those principles of piety and faith which God has revealed in his word, and which are to be urged by "precept upon precept and line upon line" from parental lips. And when parents are unable to do so personally, through defect of ability or the urgency of paramount duties, it is their privilege to do so through the kind offices of others; but for no reason whatever can they innocently fail to improve the spring time of life, for scattering over the rich field of infant mind committed to their charge, the seed that may spring up and bring forth fruit thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold, to the glory of God.

6. A failure in the discharge of parental obligations to children, imposes on others who fear God, the duty of teaching them knowledge. As the offspring of our Father in heaven they are immortal, and as children of disobedience they are exposed to death eternal.

Yet for them the blood of Calvary hath flowed, for them the Holy Spirit hath made known the purposes of eternal justice and mercy; and for them hath the church prayed in all generations, assured of the compassion of heaven towards them by the strong

language of the Saviour "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not." But prayer, important as it is, is not the only office of Christian love owing to them, nor can it even satisfy the claims of benevolence upon those who owe all that is animating in their hopes and precious in their consolations to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Too long has the Christian world slumbered while generation after generation has arisen, and sported in the sunshine of its brief day, and passed on to the darkness of eternal night. Either the connexion between prayer and labor has been ill understood, or the means by which the mass of youthful mind is to be brought under the influence of the gospel have been imperfectly apprehended. Not till century on century had passed away under the ever increasing light of the Sun of Righteousness, did it occur to a solitary mind, that thousands of neglected youth, with souls as precious as Gabriel's and as polluted as fallen Adam's, might be collected on the Sabbath from the streets and lanes of the city, and the farm-houses and workshops of the country, to learn the will of God, and prepare for usefulness and immortality; "a possibility this," says one, "which had never before been suspected; a disclosure as of some hidden power of nature." Scarcely had the brilliant thought been conceived, however, when it took wing and soared into mid-heaven, and displayed its beauty before all eyes, and, claiming a Divine origin, sent forth its notes of love in tones as sweet as those which filled the ears of Bethlehem's shepherds. The philanthropic spirit swelled with delighted emotion. The pious heart exulted in hope and joy. Meek-eyed charity now saw the redemption of the world drawing nigh, and, with outstretched hand, took the celestial visitant to her bosom, and blessed it with her smiles, and nourished it with "wine and milk, without money and without price." Already has it made the circuit of the world, and on all lands planted its foot, though not all tribes of men yet bid it welcome.

To the origin and progress of this lofty conception of sanctified mind, or its adaptedness to the pressing necessities of Zion and the world, this is neither the time nor the place to devote our attention. A passing allusion is all that is permitted; and if we add the conviction of its perfect harmony with the spirit that brought the Saviour from heaven to earth—that sent abroad the apostles to evangelize all nations—that still sustains the herald of salvation in his labors of love for dying men, and flings abroad, on every breeze, those leaves that are for the healing of the nations; and if to this we add the facts that millions on millions otherwise uninstructed, have already been taught the first principles of the oracles of God, and that thousands on thousands have embraced the faith of the gospel and learned to cherish the hope that maketh not ashamed; and that of these, hundreds have risen to stations of eminent use-

fulness, and now shine as lights in the world,—we have perhaps discharged our duty.

Yet of the fulness and glory of these results no adequate conception can be formed by any intelligence on this side of Heaven. To comprehend them in all their bearings on man's earthly interests alone, demands a reach of mind unknown to mortals; for until the extent to which they have resisted the encroachments of infidelity and licentiousness, expelled vile passions from the heart, palsied the arm of violence, abashed the face of crime, strengthened the bonds of friendship and love, promoted economy and enterprise, and insured fidelity in the discharge of relative and social duties can be ascertained from *heaven's* records, no man can conceive of them. And then, to comprehend them in their bearings on the destinies of *eternity*, or the happiness of redeemed myriads, or the joys of the angelic hosts over returning sinners, or the revenue of glory brought to man's Redeemer—and in the illustration of the matchless perfections of Jehovah—is far beyond the compass of any other than the Infinite mind.

Well may we felicitate ourselves on the kind Providence that has given us our birth at a period of the world's history, so auspicious to the movements of Christian benevolence, and cast our lines in the pleasant land where the common charities of life, and the workings of the noblest beneficence so harmoniously blend in bringing forth results, at once glorious to God and useful to man. The harp of heaven brought down to earth has a thousand strings that may all be touched by human hands, whose mingling vibrations swell the strain of "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men," and send a thrill of transport to the northern and the southern poles, the world around, while they awake the lyres of the upper world, and make the heavenly arches ring. Happy he who plays upon a single chord of that instrument to ears accustomed long to discordant sounds; and happier still is he who strikes string after string with practised art, in charming unison with the multitude who praise the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in earth and heaven, for HE wakes up a joy that shall circle the universe while eternity endures.

7. To insure these results, in their full extent, requires the merging of minor differences of opinion and feeling among Christians, in the broad stream of love flowing from the throne of God. The ultimate success of the holy enterprise demands it. The honor of Christ and the salvation of man demands it. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them that believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us." This prayer from lips that the Father heareth alway shall be answered; but while the answer is delayed, reproach falls on the Great Intercessor, and

the world rejects his claims. I say not that a perfect union of all the followers of Jesus in thought, word and deed, is possible in the present imperfect condition of their being—for

> "Different minds
> Incline to different objects; one pursues
> The vast alone; the wonderful; the mild;
> Another sighs for harmony—and grace
> And gentlest beauty."

But I say that the fault is their own, if they see not, eye to eye, on the great points of Christian duty, and if they unite not their labors cordially to "teach the young knowledge and make them understand doctrine." Strange it is that those who have entered on "the way of life," and who severally admit their own imperfections, yet so indifferently bear with each other's infirmities, and contend so strenuously for "trifles light as air" in their respective creeds and measures; when, by their own admission, the world lieth in wickedness, and thousands every day rush ignorantly down into the abyss from which there is no deliverance; and when too they concede to each other the name and the spirit of Christ, and exult in the prospect of their future intercourse in a world of unmingled love and praise! Surely prejudice and jealousy and evil surmising and contention ill become them, while they profess to serve the same master, and execute the same commission, and cultivate the same spirit, and exemplify the same heaven-wrought character. Would that it were not known in Gath, nor published in the streets of Ascalon, that they sometimes forget their common parentage and brotherhood! But a brighter day is coming. The morning star hath appeared, standing over the birth place of the spirit that imitates the Great Shepherd's gathering the lambs in his arms, and carrying them in his bosom. Wise men behold it and admire. The unlearned and the ignorant fall down before it and adore. The mighty man and the honorable, the mean man and the weakling, together bring their gifts and lay them on the altar of this newborn child of heaven, and worship HIM who by the breath of his mouth, has called into being the SABBATH SCHOOL,—his own representative.

May there not be perfect union and co-operation here? Not another object within the reach of Christian enterprise combines more of simplicity and grandeur than that which promises to bring forth the infant intelligence of the age, from the lower and the higher walks of life, and conduct it along the paths of wisdom into the presence of the Ineffable Glory! And the means proposed for the accomplishment of the object are equally unostentatious and childlike as the object itself. There is instruction in the oracles of God by the living teacher, himself familiar with the habits of thought and action prevalent among his pupils; there is the sym-

pathy of kindred minds pursuing an object of acknowledged sublimity and worth; there is the general supervision of the pastor, or other officers of the church, and the daily ascending prayer of the faithful; and there is the richly replenished library, whence the scholar, the teacher and the parent, whether thoughtless or serious, prayerless or devout, may draw the weekly supply of wholesome instruction, such as the Spirit of God employs to fit the soul for heaven.

Of the efficiency of these means none can doubt. It is indicated by the principles of our common nature, by the teachings of Scripture, by the example of individual saints, and even by the zeal and perseverance with which the enemies of Christ employ a part of them for unhallowed purposes.

The wily magician neglects not his enchantments. The artful unbeliever sets his net to entrap the unwary, on the same ground and with the same carefulness as the man who aims at the salvation of the lost. As the dragon cast out of his mouth water, as a flood, after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away, so does the same foul spirit, by the unholy and licentious issues of the press, aim to corrupt and destroy the Church of God, through its influence on the youthful generation of all lands. Shall the earth keep the woman still, and swallow up the flood that issues from the dragon's mouth? Then must the friends of Jesus husband their resources, concentrate their energies, and pour the full tide of their influence in one broad and deep stream through a sanctified press, on the whole breadth of the earth.

Such union and concentration alone can secure the object in their eye. And surely they will not suffer millions of the lambs of the flock to wander from mountain to hill, shelterless and hungry, amid poisonous shrubs and beasts of prey, when by due economy of their means, they may provide folds and pasturage for them all—or to change the figure—throw over them a shield, broad as heaven, for their protection, and secure their retreat within the arms of the great Shepherd of Israel.

Proverbially true is it that "two are better than one." Equally true is it of the individual, and the religious denomination. Isolated efforts, put forth with the greatest elevation and purity of purpose, can reach but a small portion of the youthful population of our country; for denominational lines that divide the parents divide the children also; and the prejudice or indifference which operate against the ministers or the church of a rival sect, operate equally against the teacher, and the library of that sect; and then pecuniary support fails. Faith languishes. Love degenerates into sectarian favoritism. Zeal for God gives way to zeal for party peculiarities; and every resource on which reliance is placed for the support of the Sabbath school is soon exhausted, and it sinks into annihilation by its own weight. But let evangelical denominations lay out of

sight their differences, on points that involve not the essential truths of Christianity, and take hold with one heart and a strong hand on the Godlike enterprise of rearing up a whole generation to know the Lord, and a moral energy shall be evolved, in the progress of their labors, adequate to shaking the empire of ignorance and sin to its foundations, and diffusing the light and knowledge of heaven over its whole extent.

The means appointed by Providence for the conversion of the world, form but one beautiful and harmonious system, combined in all its parts with wondrous skill. It has wheels upon wheels, rings upon rings, high and awful, full of eyes round about, and ever moving as the living spirit moves, with no other friction than human infirmity creates. As the result of the successive revolutions of this stupendous moral machinery the world is supplied with the Holy Scriptures, with the living preachers of righteousness, and the ministration of Divine ordinances; with the almoners of Christian charity, tract distributors, and Sabbath school teachers, who gather around them neglected infant crowds, and inspire them to shout Hosanna to the Son of David. Variety and harmony of means, is the law of Providence. Order out of confusion is its end. Even human imperfection is constrained to co-operate with heaven's wisdom, in bringing about the grand result of concord and good will throughout the intelligent universe. And what I affirm is, that it is man's privilege and honor to follow the line of providential dispensation instead of vainly attempting to cross it.

If there be variety in the opinions and feelings of Zion's friends on subordinate points of duty, yet let there be harmony of action on other points of admitted magnitude, to which the spirit of love directs their eyes, as points of glorious attainment. And though confusion of thought and of language, on inferior questions may arise, (which no preciseness of definition nor fervor of piety will at once remove,) yet whoever follows on to know the will of God shall draw, even from that confusion, order and triumph.

We all love the country that gave us birth; the laws that protect our lives and property; the institutions that expand our minds, warm our affections, give success to our enterprises, and heaven to our hopes; but this country and these blessings had never been ours had not the Spirit of Christ, moving on the hearts of our fathers, constrained them to merge individual differences in the one great object of securing to themselves and posterity, the sacred rights denied them in the land of their birth. Few in number, poor in treasure, and lightly esteemed by the wise and the mighty, UNION was their strength; and from it sprung the temples, the schools, the colleges, and the senate chambers, that have nourished the spirit of benevolence, and created the thousand voluntary associations which now adorn the land and bless the world. Let the same bond of perfectness connect the sons of God of every name

among their descendants, in reference to the object before us this evening and all kindred objects, and shortly the blessings of Sabbath school instruction shall be as widely diffused as are the beams of the sun, and the showers of heaven, that clothe alike with verdure and beauty the hill-top and the vale.

8. In this view we contemplate with admiration and gratitude the principles, and the spirit of the AMERICAN SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION. Without affirming its exemption from imperfections common to all benevolent associations, conducted by fallible and sinful men, we venture to claim for it a combination of so much that is divine in principle, comprehensive and effective in movement, pure and elevated in spirit, as justly challenges universal confidence and support. What are its objects but to concentrate the efforts of Sabbath school societies and their friends throughout the land, on principles of common sympathy and advantage, bringing them to bear most efficiently on the instruction of the whole rising generation; to disclose and mature the best possible system of instruction, and prepare the most acceptable manuals for the use of teachers and learners; to diffuse information to the widest extent, by means of missionaries, agents and periodicals; to circulate as extensively as possible, books in great variety, decidedly evangelical in their spirit, and healthful in their tendencies; and then to establish Sabbath schools, with all their happy influences, wherever is found a population wending its way to the bar of God. Thus are harmony of counsel, and effectiveness of action, strength of purpose and intrepidity of zeal, to be secured among the friends of the Sabbath, and the religious education of youth, while all classes of men shall be enlightened and improved. And I hesitate not to say, that I am yet ignorant of the institution which operates at once so silently and with equal power to bring about the great moral revolution of our country, for which every patriotic heart, and every tongue of hallowed fire, send forth their devoutest aspirations.

Happy were it for Zion were the objects of the "Union" better understood, and its principles more justly appreciated, for its means and its results could not then fail of indefinite enlargement. Certain it is that its claims on Christian patronage are not adequately met, either through ignorance of its far reaching and Divine philosophy or through the short lived triumph of unworthy jealousies over the clearest evidence of its practical utility.

Does it aim at private or inferior ends? The character of its founders,—ever foremost among the liberal supporters of every branch of benevolent enterprise; the good it has accomplished, and throws open to the cognizance of all; the testimony of thousands of living Sabbath Schools, and of tens of thousands of its

past beneficiaries, still toiling on earth or swelling the songs of Heaven—answer—No!

Does it claim a disproportionate share of public munificence? It asks nothing beyond the promptings of clear-sighted benevolence, in view of the Saviour's command, "Freely ye have received, freely give," and expects to be judged, in all simplicity, by its fruits and patronised with cheerfulness and constancy only according to its tested merits.

Does it indulge in extravagant expenditures? Tell us where! Tell us where? If its means are restricted it lives and prospers within them. It holds fast to a strict accountability, and submits each item of expense to public scrutiny, without fear or censure. What means it has it uses to the best advantage without meanness; and asks the services of no man without making his bread and water sure. Is this extravagance?

Does it seek independence of public patronage? That patronage is its life; without it the corse from which the spirit has fled is not more cold and motionless; nor till the heart shall say to the blood, I have no need of thee, and the head to the members, I have no need of you, will this institution say to the public, by word or deed, 'your favor is not needful to us.' It maintains, indeed, the elevated and independent course of movement demanded by its responsibilities to God, and its relations to humanity and Zion, otherwise it forfeits the need of public confidence; and it betrays the great interests committed to its care, if it be disgraced by servility to individual prejudice or popular caprice.

Does it interfere with denominational rights and privileges? So far from it, it co-operates with every evangelical denomination in the diffusion of knowledge and love; nor throws it the slightest impediment in the way of any who are urged by conscience to extend the influence of their peculiarities of faith. Strongly planted itself in the broad platform of our common Christianity, it denies not its hope ultimately to gather into one all things in Christ, inspiring everywhere mutual confidence and love among brethren; and stimulating effort to fulfill the Saviour's great commission, while it holds its peace on every subject of sectarian strife. Knowing nothing but Christ and him crucified, the tendency of all its movements is doubtless to weaken partizan sympathies, to diminish jealous rivalries, and to quench the unhallowed fires of Shibboleth animosities.

Does it trench on the duties of pastors and parents? On the contrary it enforces, in the most persuasive manner, the purest instructions of the pulpit and the fireside. The Sabbath School is the nursery in which the tender plants committed to the care of the spiritual husbandman, are trained by other hands, under his own supervision, till strong enough for removal to more spacious fields; where, unharmed by scorching heat or blasting cold, they

may bring forth pleasant fruits, till the time arrives for their transplantation to the paradise above. And, so far from diminishing the amount of parental duty, it but facilitates the discharge of it; rebukes supineness, and repeats in the parent's ear, as each holy day returns, the divine injunction "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," reminding him that he has fellow-laborers in the great work of preparing his offspring for the skies, raised up by heaven to supply the lack of service over which he often weeps in bitterness of spirit.

And in this connexion it may not be impertinent to remark that the efficiency of the "Union," under God, wholly depends upon the support it derives from the ministry and the churches. At their word it lives, and at their frown it dies. Let them be zealously affected toward it, and it flourishes like the palm tree, though buffeted by all the winds of heaven let loose; let them be indifferent to its prosperity and regardless of its calls on their aid, and it droops like the uprooted flower of the garden. It is the offspring of faith, and sympathises in all the weaknesses of its parent. It is the adopted child of charity, and shares the benedictions and reproaches poured on the head of its foster-mother. It is the fair creation of Providence starting forth on its career of Godlike beneficence, amid the shoutings of attendant angels, and doomed to blight and desolation only when Satan wakes and its heaven-appointed guardians sleep. It is an infant Moses, destined by high decree to usefulness and honor, but cradled for a season in the ark of bulrushes, till a heaven-directed hand plucks it forth from danger and commits it to Zion's maternal care with the charge "take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay thee thy wages." Live it must—live it will, as certainly as did Israel's deliverer, unless we misinterpret the promises of revelation, and the indications of Providence relative to the day in which

> "One song employs all nations; and all cry
> Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us."

And if it live not by the instrumentality of the ministry and churches already existing, then will God raise up a holier ministry and purer churches who shall press it to their breasts, and bear it on their arms, and save it harmless from the archers that sorely grieve it, and make its bow abide in strength, and gather around it the blessings of heaven above, and of the deep beneath, blessings reaching to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills.

My brethren, we have before us the object of restoring to purity and love a lost race, for which heaven has poured forth its richest treasures, and to secure the widest manifestation of that glory which fills the upper world with transports of joy. It is an object before which the material universe sinks into insignificance; defying our utmost powers of comprehension, but demanding our

utmost zeal and unremitted effort. Among the various instrumentalities devised by the providence of God for securing it, none is more simple, direct, or effective, than the seizure of the mass of youthful mind by the strong arm of Christian love, and binding it by a chain of light to the throne of the Eternal, ere it shall have been caught up by the demons of the pit, and thrown into the prison house whence there is no escape.

Both the object and the instrumentality are too vast to be grasped at once. We begin at our firesides, and then gather in the children of our neighbors, and then extend our influence over other communities, until thousands and tens of thousands are brought within the reach of instruction and trained up for heaven's employments. I say, for heaven's employments! What, my brethren, is heaven itself but an everlasting Sabbath in the presence chamber of God, where are congregated myriads, out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and language, ever learning more and more of the wonders of infinite intelligence and love. And is it fancy that sees in angels who excel in wisdom, the appointed teachers of the uncounted multitudes, and in the Word who in the beginning was with God and is God, the superintending energy, regulating each movement of the teacher and the taught; and in the books penned by the recording angel, the exhaustless library of Divine knowledge, read with intense and ever growing interest while eternity endures? O, it is not fancy. Heaven is the great Sabbath School of the universe, of which our own are the imperfect "patterns," and in which the lofty exercises never weary, and never end!

But for a moment limit your views to your own country, embracing already nearly twenty millions of undying men; bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh; occupying two millions of miles of territory, exceeded by none in its capabilities of sustaining a dense population, nor in facilities for the accumulation of wealth; and equalled by none in the rapid increase of its deathless energies, the nobleness of its institutions, the equity of its laws, the liberality of its government, and its influence on the destinies of the world, when a little more than fifty years shall have augmented our numbers to an hundred millions. It is a question of thrilling interest—what shall be the character and the circumstances of these swarming multitudes?

It is neither presumptuous nor unkind to affirm, that half our present population are denied the ministrations of the gospel in its purity, either by the minister of the sanctuary, the Sabbath School teacher, or the page of inspired truth. And the proportion of the uninstructed will inevitably and vastly increase, without earnest and self-sacrificing labor on the part of the patriot and the Christian. For we have, in the midst of us, Sectarianism in multiplied and revolting forms of ignorance and delusion; Romanism with its sycophantic lips, and ironbound soul; Infidelity with serpents en-

turned about its head and eyes that turn men into stone; Atheism with its hundred hands of violence, and its fifty mouths of blasphemy; vice, crime and reckless passions threatening a deluge of blood and fire—and all accumulating new power every day by the influx from the emptied alms-houses, brothels, and prisons of Europe. These enemies of God and our country are to be met and vanquished on the open field, or within their fortified entrenchments, only by spiritual weapons.

Nor are they to be foiled and overthrown by our fears or our hopes, nor by our boasting and defiance. Dangers encompass us. A dark abyss yawns at our feet. The heavens lower above us. The elements meet in conflict around us, and unless the Lord be on our side *we* are swallowed up quick. But safety may be found. It is announced to us in heaven's gentle whisper, "this is the way, walk ye in it." "Teach your CHILDREN and make them understand doctrine." Bid the herald of salvation, and the Sabbath School teacher go hand in hand throughout the land; their doctrine dropping as the rain, and their speech distilling as the dew, and future generations shall arise and become a wall of fire around the dwelling-place of Jehovah, and a glory in the midst of it.

I have alluded to the prospective influence going forth from us to affect the destinies of the world. Already there is scarcely a land so remote, or a clime so inhospitable, or a tribe of men so small, that our name has not reached it, and awakened a spirit of inquiry into the genius of our religious and civil institutions. Every year, as it extends our commerce, and increases our wealth, extends our fame, and nourishes a spirit in other lands, that will never rest till the blood-stained sword of despotism is every where broken, and dark-faced ignorance banished to the realms of its foster father—the prince of darkness. Let our population continue to swell as for the hundred years past, and our intercourse with the nations to be maintained and increased, our literature and science to keep pace with our agricultural and mechanical improvements, and not an angel's tongue can tell the amount of that influence an hundred years hence. The question is, shall it be an influence baptized in the fountain opened on Calvary; and go forth armed with the authority of the law of God, rearing the sanctuary, disseminating the word of life, planting the Sabbath school, diffusing light and love at each advancing step, and spreading abroad the glories of the millennial day over a benighted world? Or, on the other hand, shall it go forth under the control of the spirit of unbelief, and insubordination to the laws of God and man; embroiling kingdoms in war and bloodshed; harpy-like, first tearing in pieces and then polluting and devouring whatever is noble and lovely in the privileges and joys of the great community of nations? The question awaits the calm decision of the philanthropist and the Christian.

Brethren! the work before you is nothing less than to bring your whole country into cheerful subjection to Christ, making it the glory of all lands, by converting it into a mountain of holiness, from whose summit shall descend perennial streams of richest blessing to purify the nations, till "the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters and the voice of mighty thunderings, shall be heard saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, are given to the people of the saints of the Most High."

A SHORT SERMON.

EARLY CONVERSION OF CHILDREN.

"I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."—Prov. viii. 17.

The early conversion of children is of unspeakable importance. In the view of christian parents, who are alive to the worth of the soul, the thought that their children to whom they have given birth shall live and die in their sins, and be for ever excluded from heaven is a reflection, which is unutterably painful. And in view of the promises which cluster around the period of childhood the wonder is that any christian parents can remain satisfied or indifferent for a single day till their children are converted to God. If they believe these promises of the Bible, and would come to God in humble reliance on his spirit and put his faithfulness to the test, by earnest supplication, who can tell how many christian parents would rejoice in the early conversion of their children.

The following are some of the considerations which show the importance of the early conversion of children.

1. 'If conversions take place early, *less time will be spent in the service of the world, and, consequently, the power of the adversary will be proportionably diminished.* There are two great powers striving for the ascendency in this world,—Christ and Satan, with their respective followers. The followers of Christ are those who are won from the ranks of Satan. Formerly they have been suffered to remain there till the best part of their lives have been spent in opposing the advance of holiness. Now, if they can be won over to the side of Christ ten or fifteen years earlier, so much will be subtracted from the power of the adversary.

2. But not only is the power of Satan lessened by early conversions, that of Christ's cause is to the same extent increased. Instead of giving ten or twenty years to the service of Christ, you give thirty, forty, or fifty. Thus the cause of holiness gains a double advantage. If, in war, a hundred of the enemy fall in battle while we lose nothing, we have gained an advantage. But how much greater is the acquisition if, instead of falling, they desert and come over to our side!

3. Again those who are converted in early childhood *will do less injury to the cause of their Master when they engage in the active business of life*, than if their conversion were delayed till they arrive at adult years. There are few christians who do not often find reason to mourn over injuries done to the cause of Christ by the manner of their lives. Of many christians it may without doubt be said with truth to their death, "they have done more hurt than good." This arises very much, if not chiefly, from injurious habits formed and established while in impenitence. One had the habit of covetousness firmly established before conversion, and now it is his besetting sin. The world look on and exclaim, "There is one of your professors of religion, as close-fisted as any man on earth." Thus his habit is made the occasion of their stumbling and destruction, and dishonors Christ. Another christian is the subject of some other bad habit which gives offence. But let conversions take place in childhood, and let the habits be formed after the christian model, and these injurious effects will not be seen.

4. *The amount of good performed during any given portion of life will be greater in proportion as conversions take place earlier.* Not only will the *time* for doing good be increased by early conversions, but the *power* of doing good will also be augmented. *Good* habits occupy the ground which otherwise would have been occupied by *evil* habits. But this consideration is of little importance compared with the *increase of holiness* which will thus be secured.

5. Another thing which renders early conversions of great importance to the cause of Christ is the fact, that thus *opportunity is afforded the christian of choosing and preparing himself for that employment in which he can do the most good.* How many christians who commenced living for Christ after they were settled in life, are now bitterly lamenting the necessity of spending the remainder of their days in a business which they would not have chosen had they become pious earlier. Many, whose natural talents are such as would lay the foundation for eminent usefulness in the ministry, are plodding along in an employment unfavorable to the exercise of extensive influence, because they chose their occupation without reference to the will of Christ, and entered upon his service when it was too late to change. How many churches that are now destitute of one to break to them the bread of life, might have been enjoying the regular ministrations of pious pastors! How many that are bowing down to idols might have now been singing the praises of the Lamb had early conversions been common in the last generation!

6. The early conversion of the children of pious parents is important, because, *the anxiety of the parents for their children will thus be lessened*, and consequently they will be able to devote more of their thoughts and strength to efforts for the conversion of others. How much is the usefulness of christian parents impaired by those consuming cares and anxieties which are preying upon their hearts, in view of the dangers to which their unconverted children are exposed! And how much more efficient might they be in the service of Christ, could they put forth their desires and efforts for the salvation of those around them, unencumbered by the sad reflection, that their own children are still out of the ark of safety!

7. The last consideration we present as a mouve to effort for the conversion of children is, that *in this way* ONLY *can the full effect of christian family example be brought to bear upon the impenitent world.* The example of an *individual* is powerful, but how much more powerful is that of a *family*. But what becomes of the family influence where the children grow up in impenitence and remain unconverted till they go out from under the parental roof? It is impossible so to train up a family in impenitence that the conduct of the children shall not, to a greater or less extent, prove a stumbling block to the world. An ungodly parent witnesses the vicious practices of the children of christians, and does not see but his children are as well governed and obedient as theirs. Oh! it is enough to cause the truly pious heart to bleed to think of the injury which religion sustains from the scandalous conduct of the children of pious parents. And all this because they are unconverted. They neither do good themselves nor allow their parents to do it.

In view of these considerations we ask christian parents, can you look upon yourselves as faithful to your Master while you are not earnestly seeking the early conversion of your children? Would you have a large portion of the time and influence of your children rescued from the service of the devil and consecrated to Christ,—would you see them engaging in those employments in which they can do most for their Saviour,—would you be free yourselves from anxious forbodings in reference to your children, and thus be able to engage with a cheerful heart in doing good,—especially, would you have the example of your family, while under the parental roof, tell on the side of Christ,—do you earnestly desire these things? Then surely you will not spare any effort which promises to prove effectual in bringing them into the fold of the good Shepherd.'